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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	1
WORKSHOP COMMITTEE AND SPONSORS	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	5
MODELLING CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT ON CULTURAL HERITAGE – THE EUROPEAN PROJECT CLIMATE FOR CULTURE.....	9
<i>J. Leissner, R. Kilian</i>	
EU-CHIC: EUROPEAN CULTURAL HERITAGE IDENTITY CARD - TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO DOCUMENTING CULTURAL HERITAGE.....	14
<i>V. Rajčić, B. Vodopivec, R. Žarnić, W. Kippes</i>	
USING LOCATION-RELATED KNOWLEDGE TO IMPROVE PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE OF THE WILANOW PALACE MUSEUM.....	21
<i>W. Baginski</i>	
THE POTENTIAL FOR INDICATORS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON CULTURAL HERITAGE	26
<i>C. Daly</i>	
THE MEMORI TECHNOLOGY FOR MOVABLE CULTURAL ASSETS.....	34
<i>E. Dahlin, T. Grøntoft, S. Lopez-Aparicio, P. Bellendorf, A. Schieweck, K. Drda-Kühn, M.P. Colombini, I. Bonaduce, P. Vandenabeele, R. Larsen, A. Potthast, O. Marincas, D. Thickett, M. Odlyha, G. Andrade, S. Hackney, C. McDonagh, J. Ackerman</i>	
MITIGATION STRATEGIES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE IMPROVEMENT OF MICROCLIMATES WITHIN CULTURAL HERITAGE OBJECTS AND MUSEUM INSTITUTIONS.....	40
<i>A. Schieweck</i>	
IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND AIR POLLUTION ON CULTURAL HERITAGE: COMPARISON OF EUROPEAN MAINTENANCE COSTS FOR BUILDING FAÇADES	45
<i>T. Grøntoft</i>	
CONDENSATION RISK ANALYSIS AND INDOOR CLIMATE MANIPULATION ASSISTED BY CONTINUOUS MONITORING AT JOHANNISKIRCHE IN SCHWÄBISCH GMÜND	53
<i>M. Krüger, J. M. Samuels, S. A. Bachmaier, F. Lehmann, J. Willeke</i>	
MUSEUM ENVIRONMENT: MONITORING FULLY AND PARTIALLY CONDITIONED ROOMS WITHIN SMOOHS PROJECT	62
<i>A. Troi, P. Baldracchi, M. Pamplona, M. Krüger, C. Aibéo, S. Bachmaier, B. Buczynski, S. Simon, J. Chapuis</i>	
HISTORIC ANALYSIS AND CLIMATE MONITORING: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO THE STUDY AND MANAGEMENT OF VILLA REALE IN MILAN.....	70
<i>D. Del Curto, A. Luciani, C. Manfredi, L. P. Valisi</i>	
A DAMAGE PREVENTIVE WALL HEATING IN SCHÖNBRUNN CHAPEL: MICRO CLIMATE CHANGE AND IMPACT ON SALT AND MOISTURE IN WALLS	78
<i>J. Käferhaus</i>	

COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF STRUCTURAL HEALTH MONITORING IN LOW SENSOR COUNT INSTALLATIONS USING A WIRELESS AUTONOMOUS SHM (WASHM) DEVICE.....	85
<i>F. Bastianini, G. Pascale, S. Sedigh</i>	
STRUCTURAL INVESTIGATION OF HISTORICAL STRUCTURES BY SCANNING LASER DOPPLER VIBROMETRY	93
<i>E. Esposito, A. del Conte, C. Colla, B. Dieruff, K. Fiedler, M. Pamplona</i>	
ASSESSMENT OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES BY IRT	101
<i>C. Franzen, P. Baldracchi, C. Colla, E. Esposito, G. Gaigg, R. Pfluger, A. Troi</i>	
DEVELOPMENT OF A RELIABLE AND LOW COST METHODOLOGY FOR MONITORING DURABILITY OF NATURAL STONE CONSERVATION	110
<i>J. Meinhardt, R. Snethlage, M. Auras</i>	
CONTACT-SPONGE METHOD: PERFORMANCE COMPARED WITH CAPILLARY RISE, KARSTEN TUBE AND MIROWSKI PIPE.....	117
<i>D. Vandevoorde, V. Cnudde, J. Dewanckele, M.N. Boone, E. Verhaeven</i>	
MICRO TUBE DEVICE FOR INNOVATIVE DIGITAL WATER UPTAKE MEASUREMENTS.....	126
<i>M. Drdácý, M. Černý, Z. Slížková, P. Zima</i>	
EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES BY COMBINED NDT OF CAPILLARY RISE MONITORING IN MASONRY SPECIMENS.....	131
<i>C. Colla, E. Gabrielli, A. Largo, R. Angiuli</i>	
COMPARATIVE TESTING FOR IMPROVED DIAGNOSIS OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES.....	140
<i>C. Colla</i>	
CORRELATION BETWEEN DESTRUCTIVE AND FOUR NDT TECHNIQUES ON HISTORIC TIMBER ELEMENTS.....	148
<i>V. Rajčić, C. Colla</i>	
CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL OAK WOOD FROM THE OSEBERG SHIP	156
<i>S. Braovac, K. Fackler, T.K. Bader, T. Ters</i>	
STIFFNESS PROPERTIES OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL OAK WOOD FROM THE OSEBERG SHIP	164
<i>T.K. Bader, S. Braovac, K. Fackler, K. Hofstetter</i>	
THE KAISER EFFECT IN WOOD – DOES HISTORIC WOOD HAVE A STRESS MEMORY?.....	171
<i>M. Strojceki, C. Colla, M. Łukomski, E. Gabrielli, Ł. Bratasz</i>	
ACOUSTIC EMISSION FOR MONITORING CRACK FORMATION IN ROMAN CEMENT MORTARS.....	177
<i>D. Wilk, Ł. Bratasz, R. Kozłowski</i>	
PIEZO-ELECTRIC QUARTZ CRYSTAL -BASED DOSIMETRY AND DAMAGE ASSESSMENT OF PARCHMENT AND ARTISTS' VARNISH	182
<i>M. Odlyha, S. Jakiela, J.M. Slater, L. Bozec, C. J. Bergsten, T. Gronthoft, E. Dahlin, M. P. Colombini, I. Bonaduce, D. Thickett, R. Larsen, M. Scharff</i>	
CORROSION MONITORING IN MODEL INDOOR ATMOSPHERES POLLUTED WITH ORGANIC ACIDS USING AUTOMATED REAL TIME CORROSION SENSORS	188
<i>T. Prosek, M. Kouril, F. Dubois, B. Scheffel, M. Dubus, Y. Degres, V. Hubert, M. Taube, D. Thierry</i>	
WIRELESS MONITORING OF THE INTERNAL HYGRO-THERMAL VARIATIONS IN A HISTORICAL VIOLIN DURING PLAYING - DEVICE DESIGN AND FIRST RESULTS	195
<i>G. Goli, M. Fioravanti, L. Busoni, A. Giordano</i>	
EASY SET-UP SYSTEM FOR MONITORING THE CONSERVATION CONDITIONS APPLIED TO HISTORICAL VIOLINS.....	200
<i>M. Fioravanti, G. Goli, L. Uzielli, S. Campinoti, P. Mazzanti</i>	

MEASURING OF MOVEMENTS OF MEDIEVAL PANEL PAINTINGS FOR HANDLING AND TRANSPORT.....	205
<i>I. Hopfner</i>	
MONITORING OF SALT CONTENT AND MOBILITY IN MASONRY MATERIALS.....	210
<i>C. Colla, F. Grüner, E. Gabrielli, J. Frick</i>	
3-D ELECTRICAL RESISTIVITY IMAGING AS A SMART MONITORING METHOD FOR IDENTIFICATION OF MOISTURE SOURCES IN STONE CULTURAL HERITAGE.....	218
<i>A. Dionísio, F. Alegria, E. Martinho, C. Grangeia, F. Almeida</i>	
WIRELESS IMPEDANCE MEASUREMENTS TO MONITOR MOISTURE AND SALT MIGRATION IN NATURAL STONE	224
<i>F. Lehmann, M. Krüger</i>	
A SIMPLIFIED MODEL FOR SALT DIFFUSION AND CRYSTALLISATION IN HISTORIC MASONRY	232
<i>G. Castellazzi, C. Colla, S. de Miranda, E. Gabrielli, G. Formica, L. Molari, F. Ubertini</i>	
STONE CONSERVATION FOR REFURBISHMENT OF BUILDINGS (STONECORE) - A PROJECT FUNDED IN THE 7TH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME OF THE EUROPEAN UNION	240
<i>G. Ziegenbalg</i>	
A FEW NOTES ON RESEARCH AND RESTORATION WORKS CARRIED OUT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PARDUBICE WITHIN THE FRAME OF THE EU PROJECT STONECORE.....	246
<i>L. Machačko, B. Kolinkeová, D. Macounová, K. Bayer</i>	
THE COMBINATION OF NANO-LIME AND SILICIC ACID ESTER FOR STONE CONSERVATION	254
<i>Dr. E. Piaszczyński, V. Wolf</i>	
EVALUATION OF LIME NANOSOLS FOR CONSERVATION OF WALL PAINTINGS, MORTAR AND STUCCO	262
<i>A. Dähne</i>	
INFLUENCE OF MATERIAL AND CONSOLIDANT TYPE ON AGGREGATE STRENGTHENING	267
<i>J. Valach, H. Hasníková, M. Dobrzyńska-Musiela, D. Sobkowiak, M. Gałzka-Nikonov, E. Ghaffari, R. Krompholz</i>	
COMPLEMENTARY PROTOCOL OF INVESTIGATION OF PROTEINACEOUS ADDITIVES IN HISTORICAL MORTARS.....	273
<i>S. Kuckova, M. Crhova, A. Cecilia, A. Roque, I.C.A. Sandu</i>	
REPAIR MORTARS FOR THE RESTORATION AND REPROFILING OF NATURAL STONE ELEMENTS IN CULTURAL HERITAGE	281
<i>P. Ramge, H.-C. Kühne, B. Meng</i>	
DALLES DE VERRE - DAMAGE MECHANISMS, MAINTENANCE TECHNIQUES AND MORTARS FOR RESTORATION	289
<i>M. Únal, H.-C. Kühne</i>	
REGENERATING BIR ZEIT'S HISTORIC CENTRE: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO HERITAGE PROTECTION, PLANNING, AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE RAPIDLY CHANGING PALESTINIAN RURAL SPACE.....	294
<i>I. Issa</i>	
PRESERVATION OF THE WALL-PAINTINGS IN THE JOHANNISKIRCHE IN SCHWÄBISCH GMÜND.....	302
<i>B. Dieruff, K. Fiedler</i>	
AUTHOR INDEX.....	309

WIRELESS MONITORING OF THE INTERNAL HYGRO-THERMAL VARIATIONS IN A HISTORICAL VIOLIN DURING PLAYING - DEVICE DESIGN AND FIRST RESULTS

G. Goli¹, M. Fioravanti², L. Busoni³, A. Giordano⁴

ABSTRACT

In the framework of a research dealing with the conservation of the historical violin "Guarneri del Gesù" 1743 known as the "Cannone" a set of studies were performed in order to understand the hygro-thermal stress the violin is subjected when played in a concert. These stresses mainly depend on two factors: 1. the difference between the internal display case conditions and the environmental conditions when the instrument is taken out for being played, 2. the interaction between the player and the instrument. In order to understand the hygro-thermal effects produced by a concert on the violin, a monitoring system and method was implemented by measuring the following parameters: (a) the violin mass before and after the concert, (b) the relative humidity and temperature the violin was subjected in the display case before the concert, (c) the environmental conditions outside the display case and the relative humidity and temperature inside the violin body during the whole time spent outside the display case. For the mass measurement precision balance was used, the RH and T inside and outside the display case were monitored by means of environmental probes connected to appropriate data-loggers. In order to measure hygro-thermal variations inside the violin body a special wireless system was developed in order to be acceptable by the musician and not limit his freedom. A first version was realised with two Moteiv "Tmote sky" wireless modules (receiver and transmitter) and by means of a Sensirion SHT75 relative humidity and temperature micro sensor. The wireless receiver was directly plugged into a computer, the transmitter was integrated in a plastic box to be kept in a musician's pocket and the sensor connected via a telephone cable. The sensor was introduced inside the violin through the bore of an empty end button. A second version of the device was implemented by integrating the transmitter inside a "chinrest" in order to be invisible and to be held

directly by the violin. In this paper the wireless devices are presented as well as some first results of the performed monitoring.

Keywords

Violin, Guarneri 'del Gesù'; Cannone; Niccolò Paganini, wireless sensors, relative humidity, temperature

1. Introduction

Historic musical instruments are objects with a great value because of several reasons: because the wood they are made is old and a lot of importance is given to this fact by the players, because of the manufacturer, because of the players that have owned and played the violin, because of their sound. Several instruments during their history were largely modified in order to adapt their sound to new trends. These changes (one typical operation was the adaptation of the neck by sawing the old-one and by the insertion of a new-one) were performed because a special value was ascribed to old violins (in terms of old wood and distinctive sound). These instruments, considered by the players and makers as musical instruments instead of a cultural heritage work, in a large number were completely re-adapted. This is not the case of the "Cannone" violin, made in 1743 by Giuseppe Bartolomeo Guarneri "del Gesù" and owned by the great violin player Niccolò Paganini. After Paganini's death the violin, according by his will, was left to the city of Genova, where he was born. This was an important fact for the violin conservation because after Paganini's death the instrument has maintained its own integrity. In the year 2004 an important restoration for the accessories and the set-up was undertaken by the violinmaker and restorer in charge of the violin conservation Bruce Carlson assisted by his colleagues Alberto Giordano and Pio Montanari (AA.VV., 2004). This operation would allow for recovery of the historical image of the "Cannone" as it was when it was bequeathed to the City of Genoa in 1851. Nowadays the "Cannone" is on display in the Paganiniana Collection in

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Palazzo Tursi, part of the Museums of Strada Nuova located in Genova (IT). As regards more generally wood conservation and especially violins conservation one of the main problems can be considered the physical ageing (Hunt & Gril, 1996) of the material. Physical ageing could be determined by the effects of both moisture variation and mechanical stress, as well as the coupling effects determined by their interaction over time. In order to better understand the hygro-thermal stress the violin is subjected when played in a concert, an experimental campaign was undertaken. The performed measurements were the relative humidity (*RH*) and the temperature (*T*) inside the display case before and after concerts, *RH* and *T* inside the violin and in the environment during concerts and finally the mass of the violin before and after a concert.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 T and RH Monitoring Inside the Display Case

In order to monitor *T* and *RH* inside the display case two Rotronic Hygroclip probes (accuracy $\pm 1\%RH$, $\pm 0.3^\circ C$) were used. For the acquisition a Measurement Computing 12 bits USB board type PMD USB-1208LS set to work between ± 1 V in differential mode connected to a PC driven with National Instruments LabVIEW. One sample was collected every 5 minutes.

2.2 Environmental Conditions During Concerts

In order to acquire the environmental conditions a logger type Hobo U10-003 was used presenting the following specifications: *T* accuracy $\pm 0.54^\circ C$; *T* resolution $0.1^\circ C$ at $25^\circ C$; *RH* accuracy: $\pm 3.5\%$ and *RH* resolution: 0.07% at $25^\circ C$ and $30\% RH$. The acquisition rate was set to 5 seconds.

2.3 T and RH Monitoring Inside the Violin During Concerts

The internal *RH* and *T* of the violin were measured by the means of a purposely implemented device. The reasons to implement this device were: (a) be perceptible as little as possible both for comfort of the player and for safety reasons, (b) adapt a miniaturized *RH* and *T* sensor in order to be introduced inside the violin body without being visible. A wireless approach was then chosen in order to allow: the completion of all the preliminary operations to be performed on the violin (bridge replacement, tuning, etc.) with the sensor inside the instrument without disturbing the player during concerts (classical musician are not used to play with cables around), assure the complete mobility of the player in order to avoid any accident to the violin. In order to assure these requirements a micro sensor and a wireless board were chosen. The measurement sensor was a Sensirion SHT75 (see Figure 1) with a resolution of $0.05\% RH$ and $0.01^\circ C$, with an accuracy of $\pm 1.8\% RH$ and $\pm 0.3^\circ C$. The sensor was as little as needed in order to be introduced inside the violin body through the bore of an empty end button (see Figure 1).

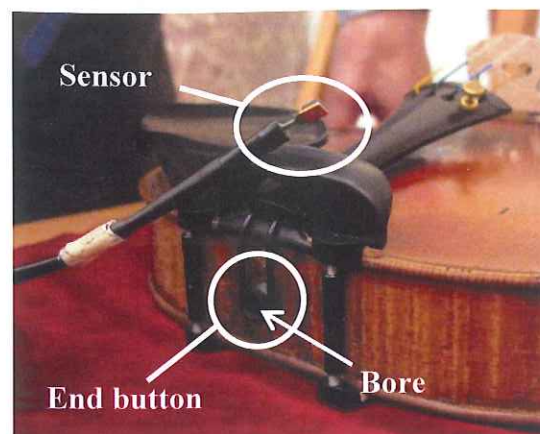


Figure 1 Sensor used for the measurements and end-button bore used to insert the sensor inside the violin

The sensor was acquired and the data transmitted over radio frequency to a PC via two Moteiv Tmote sky radio modules set as transmitter and receiver. Tmote sky radio modules were (actually they are not produced anymore) ultra low power IEEE 802.15.4 compliant wireless sensors modules. The hardware was programmed with TinyOS facilities. The sender module was programmed to acquire and send an averaged set of data every 5 seconds while the base connected to the PC to listen the data that finally were written in an ASCII type file. The program was running on a PC with installed Windows XP pro and emulating a Xubuntu operating system.



Figure 2 Monitoring during violin cleaning; the plastic box containing the wireless board is visible

The transmitter module was developed in two versions: a first prototype (a) in order to verify the functioning of the whole system with the transmitter adapted to a plastic box (see Figure 2), and a final version (b) where the transmitter was integrated inside a chinrest (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). The first prototype was functioning well but within certain limits since the plastic box needed to be fixed to the player and this solution was felt by the player as invasive.

After this first experience the system was customized in order to be inserted into a chinrest and in order to be completely transparent to the player activity. The new chinrest was designed by Mr. Alberto Giordano and

produced by the facilities of Bogaro & Clemente. The chinrest was adapted by routing a pocket in order to contain the wireless board and a bore was drilled as well as a cover realized in order to contain a 1/3N 3.0 V Lithium battery. The sensor, connected to the board by a telephone cable, entered inside the violin end button bore of about 50 mm and stayed suspended in the violin centre because of its own stiffness.

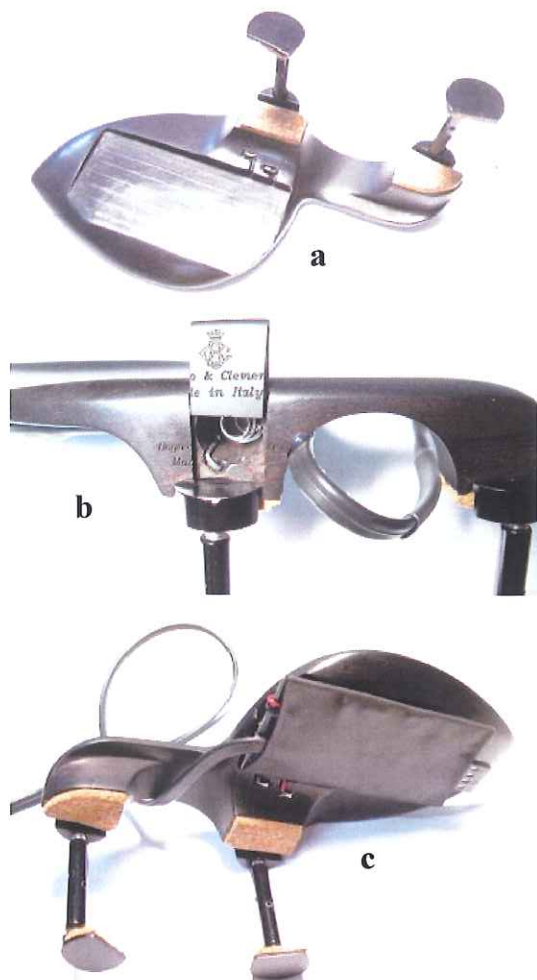


Figure 3 The chinrest prepared for the electronics mounting (a), the battery housing (b) and the electronics integrated into the chinrest (c)

In Figure 3 are shown the chinrest lower view (a) with the pocket routed in order to house the electronics, a particular of the battery housing (b), the chinrest holding the electronics (c). The chinrest mounted on the "Cannone" violin with the sensor inside the instrument is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4 The chinrest mounted on the violin with the sensor inside the body

3. Results

3.1 Mass variations during concerts

The mass variations during concerts are reported in Table 1 as well as the average T and RH inside the display case. An average RH of 53,68 % (CV 3,8 %) and an average T of 21,6°C (CV 13,5 %) was measured in the period of the concerts. As it can be observed by the low Coefficient of Variation the dispersion of data around the mean is very limited than an average of the whole period can be reasonably be taken as reference. As it can be noticed the violin mass variations resulting because of a concert are very limited. This is among other reasons mainly connected to the fact that the periods spent by the violin outside the display case were limited (the longer period the violin spent out of the display case was 4 hours as can be observed by the "Time over case" parameter in Table 1). One first thing to notice is how the violin mass increases when the RH outside the conservation case is higher then inside and decreases when the RH outside the conservation case is lower then inside. This could seem obvious but in reality shows that possibly the influence of the player is not very relevant because the general behaviour is very close to the behaviour expected without the player. Apart from this the internal RH and T measurements could give more details on the role of the player on these phenomena.

If we compare these mass variations that in the worse case are lower than 0.5 g with the whole violin mass being measured 433.18 g, we would notice that these variations are very narrow. If we suppose, according to (Simpson, 1998), the violin to be equilibrated at a 9.4 % EMC, a dry mass of 395.96 g can be computed that corresponds to a variation of moisture content over the dry mass of 0.13 % in a 4 hours period. Even considering one half of the violin dry mass as non exchanging water, because very thick and protected by varnishes, we obtain a variation of moisture content over $\frac{1}{2}$ dry mass of 0.26 % that is still very limited.

3.2 T and RH behaviour during concerts

A total number of 5 concerts were monitored and the internal and external T and RH recorded. The typical diagram resulting from a concert is reported in *Figure 5*. As it can be observed at the initial phase, when the violin is not held or played, the T and RH values inside and outside the violin are very close. As soon as the player gets in contact with the instrument two effects are visible:

- the temperature progressively rise;
- the internal RH values get different from the environmental.

It is obvious that the temperature increase is due to the contact between the player body and the violin. As it can be observed in *Figure 5* in fact, as the concert starts the temperature begins to rise, possibly with a logarithmic increment, and when the player stops playing and take the violin far from his body for a time period sufficiently long, the temperature decreases.

As regards RH , it can be observed that the internal RH (as already noticed in §3.1) stays between the external RH and the RH the violin is equilibrated too. This could be because of two main reasons:

- the formation of a particular microclimate;
- the role of the player that insert humidity in the system.

As it can be observed in *Figure 5*, on the internal RH line, the moments the player stops playing are very clear. At these moments the internal RH drops down. This is possibly because of two main reasons: when the player stops the violin is moved, making easier the air circulation with the exterior where a lower RH is measured, because after the player stops playing, consequently he stops to put in humidity and, with a higher T , relative humidity drops down.

Table 1 Environmental (Env.) and violin body internal (Int.) average RH and T measured during some concerts. Δ mass: violin mass variation during concert, Time Over Case (TOC): time spent by the violin out of the display case during the concerts

Date [dd/mm/yy]	Av. Con. T [°C]	Env. T [°C]	Int. T [°C]	Av. Con. RH [%]	Env. RH [%]	Int. RH [%]	Δ mass [g]	TOC [hh:mm]
27/06/2007	21,6	24.2	28.9	53,7	61.1	55.9	+0.38	3:00
22/09/2007	21,6	26.1	29.0	53,7	41.4	45.8	-0.37	2:45
17/10/2007	21,6	24.4	26.8	53,7	42.9	44.2	-0.39	2:00
18/10/2007	21,6	24.4	26.3	53,7	47.4	50.1	-0.25	4:00
23/05/2008	21,6	23.5	26.5	53,7	61.7	54.5	+0.47	3:15

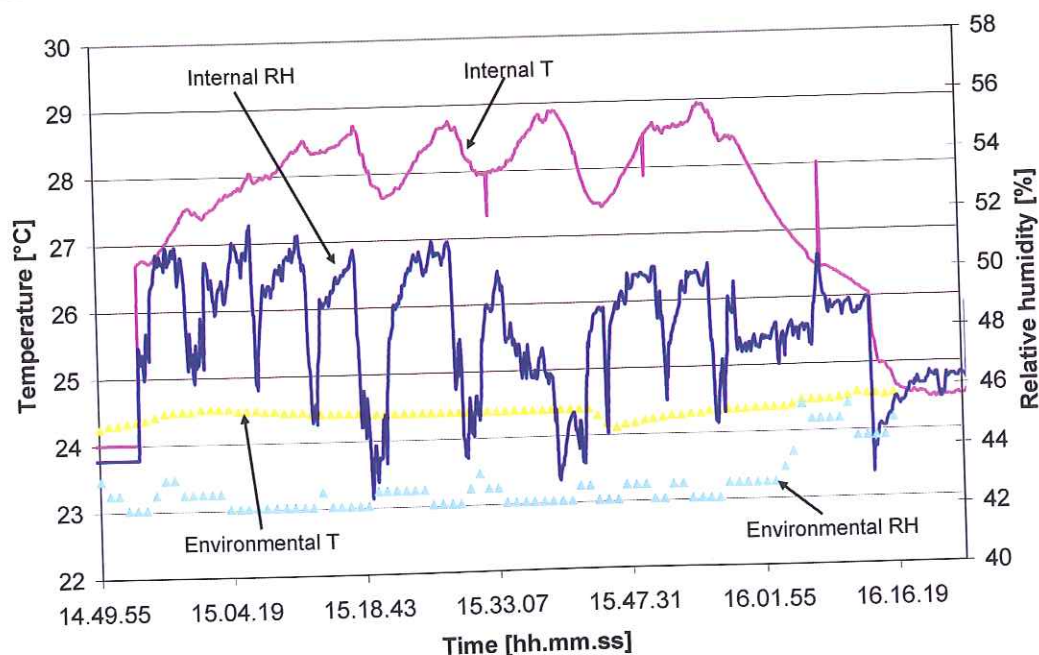


Figure 5 Violin internal and external relative humidity and temperature conditions during concert rehearsal held in Palazzo Tursi in Genova (IT) by Peter Sheppard Skærved on 17 October 2007

3.3 T and RH variations during transport

Another interesting investigation point for violin conservation was the understanding of the impact of moving the violin in different climatic conditions from one place to another inside the transport case. As it can be observed in Figure 6, in "Phase 1" are shown the values of RH and T measured by two sensors before one was introduced inside the violin. The T and RH values in this phase result very close. After the introduction of one sensor inside the violin and of the violin inside the

carrying violin case, the internal and external sensors set to different values. In "Phase 2" in fact it can be observed how, after having placed the violin inside the carrying case, the violin itself creates its own microclimate very close to the relative humidity it is equilibrated to (about 53,7 %). This condition does not change significantly even during transportation. Finally in "Phase 4" it can be observed the opening of the carrying case and how the violin starts again to be influenced by the external conditions.

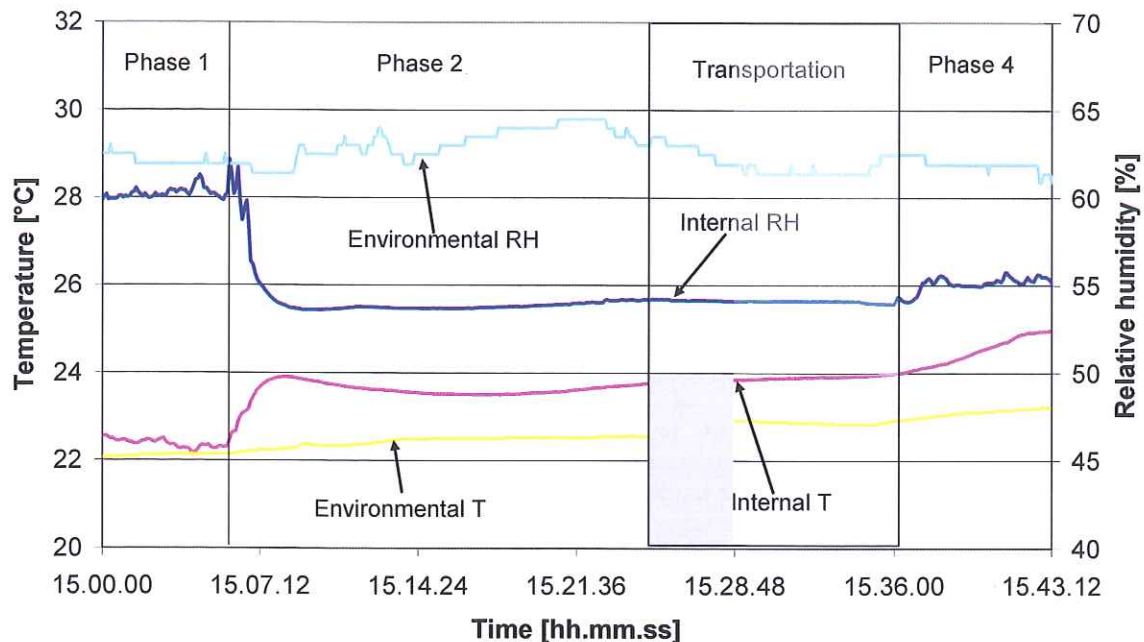


Figure 6 Effect of holding the violin inside the carrying case during transport

4. Conclusions

A complete system for monitoring the hygro-thermal stresses a violin is subjected to, when taken out from the display case and used in a concert, was implemented. In order to develop a system "transparent" to the user a wireless chinrest was developed. The system resulted to be very effective. The violin internal conditions during concerts result to be intermediate between the relative humidity inside the display case and the external environmental conditions during a concert. A thermal effect of the player was highlighted as well as the importance of the input of humidity from the player. The mass variation during concerts resulted to be very limited for a short amount of hours spent by the violin outside the display case. These are the first results that would need to be deeply analysed, in order to better understand if these hygro-thermal variations could result in mechanical stresses, dangerous for the violin conservation.

5. Acknowledgements

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